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Steampunk: An Exploration in Design

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STEAMPUNK: AN EXPLORATION IN DESIGN.

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

STEAMPUNK: AN EXPLORATION IN DESIGN.

By Christopher M. Mueller M.F.A.

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2008

Major Director: Toni-Leslie James
Head of Costume Design, Department of Theatre

The purpose of this thesis is to detail my first professional costume design job after my unofficial graduation in May 2008. This thesis will serve primarily as a design thesis, and will concentrate the majority of its efforts in the presentation of a final, original costume design for a realized production of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* as produced by Duke University. During the course of this presentation, I will seek to detail my own design process and the inspiration and research I used to achieve my goal. I will also discuss the execution of the design, problems that arose within, and my interactions with the shop, staff, and other members of the production team before summarizing my experience and discussing what I learned from the project, and what I took away from it personally.

Introduction

It was in my last semester of my graduate studies at Virginia Commonwealth University when an email came across the listserv from Duke University. Duke's Department of Theatre Studies was looking for a costume designer for their upcoming production of *Sweeney Todd*. Naturally this was an intriguing prospect; a musical, a period show, and one with loads of blood. What more could a budding costume designer ask for?

Of course I was interested. However, my design experience at this point was a bit lacking. At this point in my career I had worked professionally as the primary Costume Designer only in very small local theatres. On one hand, I had nothing to lose to go ahead and apply for the position. On the other, why should I be so bold as to submit myself for consideration for such a large production as my first official post-grad job? It seemed like a simple matter, but this was, for me, one of those moments in life where you must seek advice from higher up. My then professor, Toni-Leslie James didn't see why I hadn't already sent in my resume. "You better get on that!" was her response. So I did.

I promptly went home, opened my email, compiled what I thought was a very humble, yet professional and well thought out cover letter, attached my resume, and pressed send. Two months later I had given up on hearing anything from Duke. To be honest, I had nearly forgotten about the job. I had not heard so much as a "thank you for your interest" since I had sent in my resume.

It was approximately a month before my theoretical graduation that I finally received an email from Duke Theater's powers that be. After two months of not hearing

anything, they contacted me about an interview. Three days later, I was offered the position as Costume Designer for their fall 2008 production of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*.

So I have my first real design gig. And what a gig! This is my chance to break out of the constraints of being a design student in an educational setting and really put the skills I've learned over the last three years to the test. This is my chance to see how I do on my own without the constant guidance of my teachers and peers, and interact with a full-fledged production team without being looked upon as the student. As a student in the design program I had many opportunities to develop my skill and style in the actual design process, but I had limited opportunity to work on and develop my skills at interacting with a director and production team without an instructor as a safety net. So my goal for this production is simply this: to do it on my own.

CHAPTER 1: Pre-Production

Part 1: The Story

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street is the story of a barber who, seeking revenge on a judge and prominent member of society, murders wealthy customers by slashing their throats and dropping them through a trap door in his shop to a bakehouse below. His partner in crime, Mrs. Lovett, robs the bodies and grinds the victims into meat pies which she sells to the unsuspecting people of London. The character is based on the true story of a late 18th century barber who made a living by killing customers and robbing them. Many of the fantastical elements we're familiar with in the tale were established by the real Todd's exploits. The trick barber chair was a reality, as was Todd's association with a meat pie shop owner of the same name as her fictional counterpart. Sweeney Todd eventually became somewhat of an English bogeyman; the character used to frighten children into behaving. Todd's first appearance as a literary figure came in the popular Victorian magazine serial Penny Dreadful in a short story entitled: *A String of Pearls* by Thomas Peckett Prest. He later went on to become a pop icon in Victorian melodrama and the subject of several stories and plays including Stephen Sondheim's 1979, Tony award-winning musical version and, in its most recent incarnation, a film version directed by Tim Burton, starring Johnny Depp as the famous barber.

The musical version of this story, which this thesis will be based on, opens with Todd returning to England after being rescued at sea by Anthony, a sailor, after his escape from a 15 year exile in Australia. Todd had been banished to the Australian penal colony

on false charges by the evil Judge Turpin. Turpin coveted Todd's wife, Lucy, and wished to get Todd (then Benjamin Barker) out of the way. After a brief altercation with an insane beggar woman, Todd and Anthony part company and Todd returns to his former home and business on Fleet Street intent on reclaiming his family. There he is greeted by his former neighbor and landlord, Mrs. Lovett, the proprietor of a meat pie shop downstairs. Upon recognizing Todd she informs him that in his absence the judge raped Lucy, causing her to poison herself out of madness and grief. He then claimed their infant daughter, Johanna, as his ward. Todd vows revenge. He will reestablish his barber shop and lure the judge with the promise of a "the closest shave" he's ever had, and slash his throat.

To build his reputation Todd seeks out Pirelli, a popular street barber, and challenges him to a shaving contest. Judging the shaving contest is none other than Judge Turpin's henchman, Beadle Bamford. Todd soundly defeats Pirelli, and Beadle is more than willing to recommend him to Turpin who has decided to marry his young ward and requires some grooming to impress her. Unfortunately, Pirelli has recognized Todd as Barker and, with his young assistant Toby in tow, follows Todd home to confront him. When Toby goes with Mrs. Lovett to be fed, Todd silences Pirelli by choking him, stuffing him into a trunk, and slashing his throat.

Meanwhile, Anthony has discovered Johanna and the two have become smitten with one another. After a run-in with Turpin, Anthony seeks help from Todd to steal Johanna from him. His timing, however, could not be worse. After the encounter with Pirelli, Judge Turpin arrives at Todd's for his shave. Todd is about to claim his prize as

Anthony bursts in to ask him for help. The judge accuses Todd of conspiring against him with the young sailor, and Todd's plan is ruined. Or is it?

When Mrs. Lovett discovers Todd's brutal murder of Pirelli, she concocts a plan to dispose of the corpse by baking him into her pies. As Todd's grip on reality slips away, he begins to take his revenge on the whole of London, providing meat for many more of Lovett's pies. Her pie shop becomes one of the most popular eateries in London.

Todd formulates a new plan to capture the judge. Turpin has sent Johanna to an asylum to keep her from Anthony. Todd collaborates with Anthony on a plan to break Johanna out of the asylum and bring her to the shop. He also sends word to Turpin of Anthony's plan, so that when Turpin arrives at his shop to lay in wait for Anthony, he will have his revenge. Meanwhile Pirelli's former assistant Toby has forged a close bond with Mrs. Lovett, and suspects Todd may be planning to hurt her. To silence him, Mrs. Lovett locks him in the bakehouse where he discovers the bodies and escapes into the sewer.

That evening the Beadle arrives to investigate claims of mischief at the bakehouse. Todd coerces him to come up for a shave before beginning his investigation and adds him to the body count. While Todd and Lovett go in search of Toby, Anthony and Johanna arrive at the shop. Anthony tells Johanna, now disguised as a sailor, to stay there while he procures transport. Shortly after his departure, Johanna hears someone coming into the shop and hides in the trunk. The beggar woman (who has appeared randomly throughout the play) has come searching for Beadle. When Todd returns to find her in the shop, she claims to know him from somewhere, however, the judge has arrived and Todd has to dispose of her quickly with a hasty slash and drop to the bakehouse below. He reveals

himself to the judge, slashes his throat, and drops him to the bakehouse as well. Now he discovers Johanna (who he doesn't recognize) and is about to dispose of her as well when Mrs. Lovett screams from the basement. Johanna escapes in the confusion and Todd rushes to Lovett's aid. When he arrives, he finds Lovett finishing off the judge who startled her with his last few moments of life. Todd insists on helping her move the new bodies, and in the light of the oven he recognizes the beggar woman as Lucy. He recognizes Lovett's betrayal and seeks revenge by throwing her in the oven. The play closes with Todd cradling his wife's dead body as Toby emerges from the sewer and slashes Todd's throat with his own razor.

Part 2: The Design Concept

The beginning journey of any design process is the design concept. The concept is the director's vision of how the show will look and feel and is responsible for guiding the way that all the elements come together to create a cohesive overall look for the production. For this production of *Sweeney Todd*, the director (Dr. John Klum) and Scenic Designer (Jayme Mellama) had met prior to my hiring and decided on a Steampunk theme. Steampunk, is based on an idea of Victorian futurism. One might call it Victorian Sci-Fi, but that description seems overly simplistic. While there are scientific elements present in Steampunk, it is not decidedly futuristic per se. The elements of Steampunk are rather the imaginative extent of what Victorian technology could be capable of. Steampunk, as described on everyone's favorite online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, "is a subgenre of fantasy and speculative fiction that came into prominence in the 1980s and early 1990s. The term denotes works set in an era or world where steam power is still widely used—usually the 19th century, and often set in Victorian era England—but with prominent elements of either science fiction or fantasy, such as fictional technological inventions like those found in the works of H. G. Wells and Jules Verne, or real technological developments like the computer occurring at an earlier date." Steampunk often involves elements such as steam powered equipment, weapons, machinery, and airships that look like steam-powered pirate ships on hot air balloons.

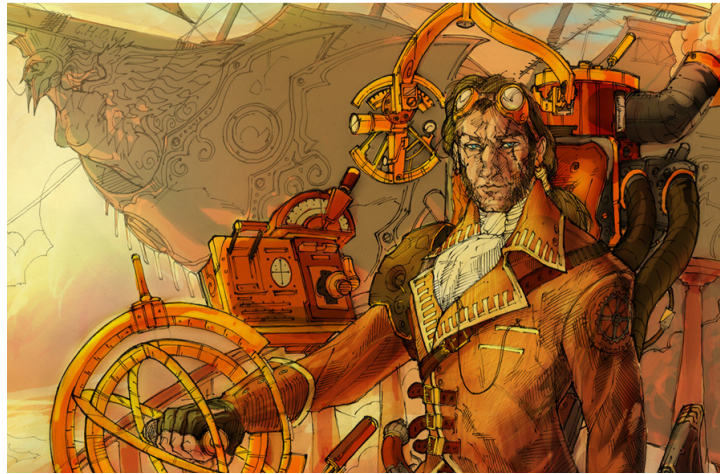


Figure 1: Airship pirate. Source unknown

It became clear early on that we would be concentrating more on the stylistic elements of Steampunk, and that attempting to insert too much of the technology would not fit in our production; at least from a costuming standpoint. The Steampunk look is largely Victorian, with elements of surrounding eras sprinkled in. It is not unusual to combine elements from the Victorian, Edwardian, and Empire periods, usually giving them an almost Old-Western twist. The real challenge with this idea is to capture the feel of the fashion elements of Steampunk without making it simply stylized Victorian. Staples of Steampunk fashion involve corsets, frock coats, and top hats paired with goggles, chains, creative mechanical closures, stylized canes, watches and other gadgets and accoutrements. Often Steampunkers lack the resources to execute the style with a proper historical sensibility, and instead opt for Hot Topic-esque PVC bustiers in place of corsets, Dickies jeans in place of trousers, and similar “close enough in look” replacements. In my research, it was images of these types of people I found. Often times I took such great inspiration from some of these images, like that of Steampunker Kit Stolen [fig 2], that I

would simply translate them into a more historically accurate silhouette, just to see where it would take me.

The style itself is very mechanical, yet organic at the same time. It also has a very distinct look to its fashion elements, which may, on the extreme side, involve steam-mechanical limbs and weaponry. Although even without the extreme, there is still a very stylized, almost old west look to Steampunk fashion. The Key is in the details. For menswear, a simple western frock ensemble may be accented with a mechanical cane or a pair of welding goggles. Women may be bustled with a shorter skirt than is the Victorian norm, or by eliminating the underskirt altogether. A true Steampunk lady may be recognized by her similarity to an old west saloon girl. However, it is also not uncommon for a female Steampunker to dress in more masculine garb or to use decidedly masculine elements in their otherwise female attire. Accessories are of particular importance when dealing with Steampunk fashion. While many of the accessories are also staples of Victorian garb, the Steampunker prefers a more modern or utilitarian version of the Victorian norm. It is not uncommon, for instance, to use a pair of modern handwarmer gloves in lieu of a gentleman's kid glove, or welding goggles or pince-nez in place of glasses.



Figure 2: Steampunk Fashion:
Steampunk fashionista Kit Stölen. Courtesy, Steampunk fashion livejournal,
Steampunk fashion photography. Courtesy Kat Bret.



Figure 2.1: Steampunk Extreme: Steampunk conventioners. Courtesy, Steampunk fashion livejournal.

In recent years Steampunk has grown into a cult phenomenon. One of the most popular themes at conventions this year has been Steampunk. It has also begun to establish itself as its own fashion subculture. Members of the punk and gothic subcultures have often found an easy transition to Steampunk as it contains aspects of both styles in its

aesthetic as well as its attitude of anti-establishment. The recent Japanese “Lolita” movement is also heavily steeped in the aesthetic that has become so popular in Steampunk Fashion.



Figure 3: Japanese Lolita Fashion and Gothic model Lady Amaranth. Courtesy, Wikimedia Commons.

The next step for me was to look at as much visual information as possible for both the Victorian era, and Steampunk fashion. Victorian was easy, as I did not have to go beyond my personal reference library for the majority of it. Steampunk, on the other hand posed an interesting problem. One would be hard pressed to find any information on Steampunk in any library. Any and all information about Steampunk, must be found on the internet. Websites such as: Jaborwhalky Productions, The Steampunk Fashion

Livejournal, and even the official webpage of Seattle based Steampunk band Abney Park offer a variety of information and reference on the Steampunk image.

For most of my historical research I went to several staples on my personal bookshelf. The indispensable Kyoto Fashion book, The Butterick Publishing Company's 1892 Metropolitan Fashions, and several fashion plates from Victorian magazines such as the Delineator. This proved to be more of a challenge to compile than to access. As I mentioned before, the period inspiration for Steampunk covers a large span of time; approximately 1802-1902 according to the Jaborwhalky Productions website. This time span may cover only 100 years, but it was a very busy century for fashion. In that 100 years we see no less than nine different changes in silhouette, particularly in women's wear (Men's wear has changed very little from the Victorian era through modern times). We start out with Empire period, characterized by its high waisted, Greek inspired gowns. This period changed slightly in 1810, then continued another ten years before moving into the Victorian era and the Crinoline period which lasted until around 1860 when we see the silhouette begin to push towards the rear for that popular Bustle look we associate with the Victorian age. The Bustle period itself went through three different silhouettes before it faded out in the late 1880s and was replaced by the Belle Epoch look the full A-line skirts dresses, and shirtwaist combos we often associate with an Anton Chekov play. It should be noted that of all these silhouettes, Steampunk seems to pull from all of them except for the Crinoline periods. Primarily women's Steampunk fashion seems to be mostly bustle era Victorian and Edwardian influenced, while menswear ranges from Empire to Late Victorian often with a heavy military influence.



Figure 4: Timeline of 19th Century female fashion plates. : Public Domain

Part 3: The Design Process

Before committing any designs to paper, it is helpful to know where your costumes will come from. Costume design is not only an art, it is a business as well, and you have to use a little creative management in order to execute any given design to its full potential. This often starts with a trip to the theatre's costume stock to see what can be used for your show. Why buy or build something that already exists? The ensemble for this show was made up of seven males and eight females. It was my hope and plan, as is all too common in our line of work, to pull as much of the ensemble as possible to save money for the principals. With the size of the ensemble, I knew most of what I might find would be spent on them alone. I was fortunate enough to find the majority of the ensemble in Duke's costume storage. Roughly ninety percent of the women's wear and eighty percent of the men's were found in storage, and many of them were a perfect fit. The rest was filled in between thrift stores and eBay. With few exceptions the entire ensemble retained roughly the same outfit throughout the show.



Figure 5.1: Preliminary Ensemble fittings. Duke University



Figure 5.2: Preliminary Ensemble fittings. Duke University

Now that I've seen what can be pulled from stock, I have a better idea of what needs to be produced in order to costume the remaining characters. The next big decision comes down to building versus buying costume pieces. This is especially important in a situation like the one at Duke University where the costume shop is run on a virtual skeleton crew. You want to put your crew to use in the best way possible, without overwhelming them. Duke University's costume shop is run by one woman, Kay Webb, who manages a fleet of approximately ten work study students from outside the department. Because Duke does not have a costume major in their theatre department, they don't have the same free, trained labor force that we have at VCU. Also, because the work study employees are not associated with the theatre or have an invested interest in the department, they tend not to be as loyal to the production. Thusly, it was paramount to keep the workload as low as possible. This is achieved by choosing carefully those items that you absolutely must have custom made. It is, of course, these choices that affect the outcome of your designs, so this is a major consideration one must make in the design process.

I was given a decent \$5,500.00 budget for materials, and an additional \$8,000.00 for labor. The latter of which I left to the costume shop manager for overhire. Typically the rule of thumb here is that you make the women's wear and buy the men's. For the most part, this is what I did. The menswear, with the exception of one jacket and several vests, was purchased or pulled. I opted to have vests made for Sweeney, The Judge, and Beadle, in order to expand my options for coordinating them with their outfits. The Judge was necessary to build both his vest and frock coat because of the overly stylized design.

Pirelli and Tobias were much simpler, as I was lucky enough to find all of their costume pieces either in storage or in thrift stores. The principal women were, for the most part, built entirely. The corsets were all purchased, the undergarments were purchased or pulled, but all of the main outer garments were built from scratch: 2 outfits for Lovett (doubled) and one for each Johanna and The Beggar. In total, I had 6 weeks to make five skirts, three overskirts, one bodice, five camisoles, nine vests, two men's shirts, two men's jackets, and a tiered Victorian day dress. Normally, this would be more than enough time to execute a build of this level, but with the modest size of Duke's costume workforce, it would still pose a challenge.

With very few exceptions, mostly with accessories, the ensemble was pulled in its entirety. Duke University's costume storage actually had an impressive selection of reproduction Victorian clothing. The women's wear ranged over an approximately forty year period, but due to the nature of the design concept, I was able to fit these pieces together into a cohesive and believable collection.

So now we have a dilemma. Where does one find Victorian men's wear off the rack? Normally I would turn once more to the wonderful World Wide Web as you can find pretty much anything on the internet these days. Unfortunately, this prospect puts me at a pretty substantial risk of getting taken advantage of by some unscrupulous internet merchant, so I was in need of some advice. Fortunately for me, Toni-Leslie James is the queen of internet costume resources. A quick call to her led me to The Gentleman's Emporium, an online Victorian clothing retailer. This became a primary resource for me.

I was also able to find items from Sierra Trading Post and River Junction, both internet retailers of Old West and Victorian clothing.

Now that I have compiled some good visual and physical resources, it's time to start looking at the individual characters and deciding how best to apply this information to the individual designs. There are several factors that go into these decisions. A Designer must take into account the character's age, race, class, where they live, the era and time of season while still reflecting the overall tone of the play. These factors are considered during the analysis of each character. There are a few factors that transcend all the characters, such as location and season. In addition to the overall theme, I must also consider that this is London, and no matter what time of year, it is likely not very warm, therefore I will push for more of a cooler climate look for the play. Also, because of the nature of the play, I will want to stick with a darker tone throughout. I must also consider how each character fits into the script itself, and what kind of requirements it may place on the character in the sense of costume changes. With a show like *Sweeney Todd*, the changes are minimal. There are few characters within the play that actually need a costume change, and most of those aren't necessarily a requirement. One of the most important issues to address in this show, however, was blood. *Sweeney Todd* can be a very bloody show if you let it. In order to better address all of these issues, it is necessary to break down each of the nine principal characters separately, and look at the requirements that must be addressed for each throughout the production.

Sweeney Todd, the titular character, has just returned to England from the penal colony in Australia. While keeping with the Steampunk theme, he should be dressed as

someone who was once a Victorian gentleman. While he has just returned from prison, it is important to keep in mind that he was not in a prison as we know it. He lived in a colony that had its own social structure and economy. He does not necessarily have to return to London in rags. It must also be noted that the 15 years he has been away must be reflected in his age. It was decided early on that Todd would have been very young when he was sent away, placing him now in his mid to late 30s. I decided that Todd would arrive in a common 3-piece suit of non-matching pieces, including a weathered black frock coat, brocade vest, and grey striped denim trousers. Todd's first look is directly inspired by the fig.2 image of Steampunker Kit Stolen. In order to bring the look together with the overall theme I added details such as "Exaggerated sleeves on his shirt, fingerless gloves, and a strategically placed watch fob. Many of the ideas came together quickly, and were immediately pleasing to the director, but I still had to go through several revisions before concluding Todd's first look. It wasn't until I found and fell in love with an off the rack coat from Gentleman's Emporium that I settled on a final design.

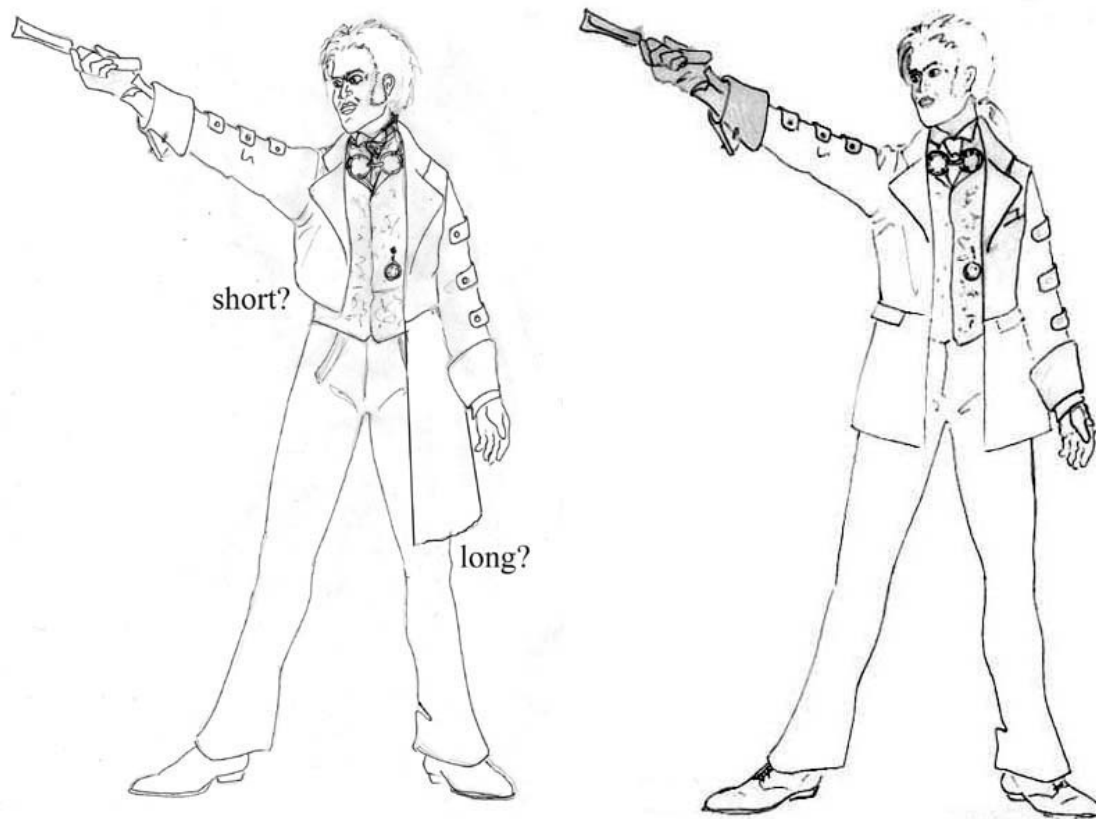


Figure 7: Todd Act 1, evolution. Pencil Sketches.



Figure 8: Vigilante Town Coat. Todd Act 1. Gentleman's Emporium.
Todd Act 1 Inspiration, Steampunker Kit Stolen. Steampunk Fashion Livejournal.

For Act II I decided that I would change Todd into something that better reflected his standing as a barber. I was immediately inspired by the barber smocks of the 1950s because of its iconic association with the barber. I started looking at these smocks and trying to translate them into something that could both be interpreted as a Victorian silhouette, and keep the Steampunk feel. Again, I went through several variations on this theme before arriving at my conclusion. I began with the idea of turning the barber smock into a vest, but it needed more. I wanted him to have some sort of carrier system for his razors so I started experimenting with attaching pockets to the vest. I still wasn't pleased with the outcome. I needed something else. It was while I was attending a convention in Atlanta that I got to examine and play with a piece of Steampunk leatherwork; a mechanical arm costume piece meant to be worn over the



Figure 9: 50s Barber smock. Act 2 Todd Reference. Getty Images.

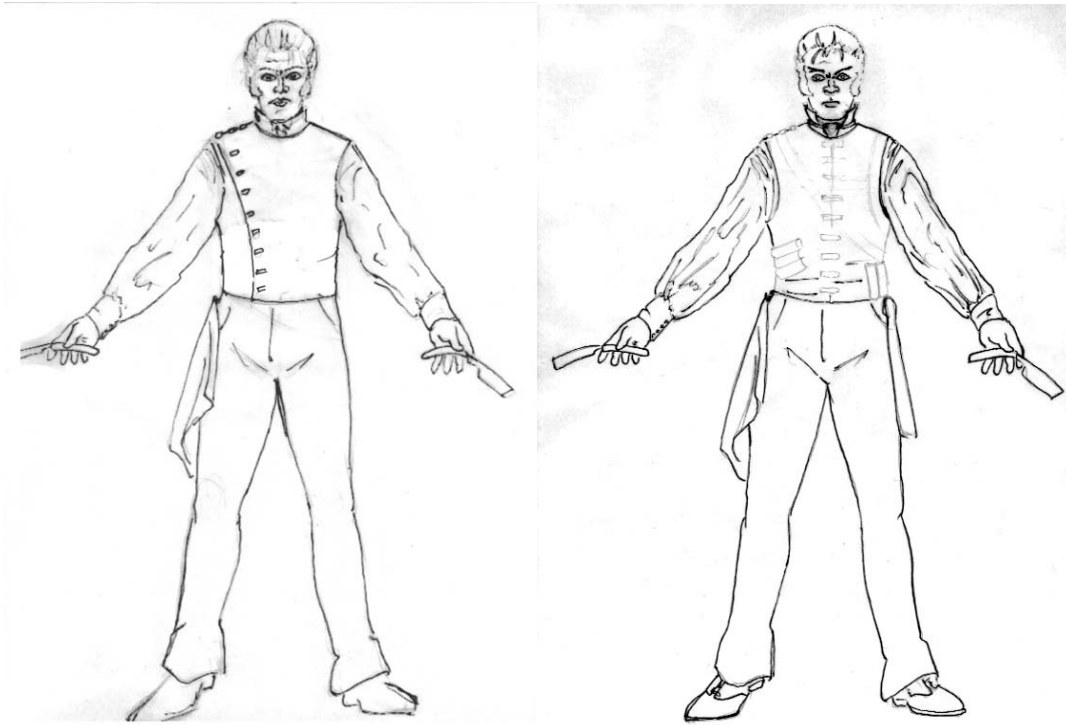


Figure 10: Todd Act 2 Evolution. Pencil Sketches.

arm. The piece gave me the idea that while it would be too much for our production, it could be used as a reference point for some sort of harness, similar to what a detective would carry his gun in, except for Todd's straight razor. The final version has Todd in a grey vest with a brown leather harness with brass insets and black pinstripe trousers.



Figure 11: Steampunk arm. Courtesy, Freddy Clements.
Figure 12: Todd Act 2 final sketch. Pencil Sketch.

Because his Act 2 costume was to be worn during his murder spree, every article of clothing had to be machine washable, so that any blood that came in contact with his shirt, vest, or tie, could be cleaned.



Figure 13: Nate Jones as Sweeney Todd Acts 1 & 2. Duke University.

The second most prominent figure in the play is Todd's partner in crime, Mrs. Lovett. She is the pie shop owner that assists him in his murder spree and is a woman driven by both an obsession for her former tenant (Todd) and a certain level of moral ineptitude. She was one of my favorites to design. She and Toby are probably the most important of all the characters in the play to have distinct costume changes from Act 1 to Act 2; mostly to show their transitions from one social class to the next. Her business is

not very successful, and she admits and even sings about her “worst pies in London.” For this production we assume that Lovett and Todd are somewhat close in age range, so we will also put Lovett in that mid to late 30s range. I immediately knew I wanted to show Mrs. Lovett in an exposed corset look. This look fits in well with the style as exposed underclothes are popular among Steampunkers. It is also reminiscent of working class look of the period. I had already found her skirt fabric and had been mulling over skirt ideas for the character when it occurred to me to simply follow the theme and make her skirt an exposed petticoat. I added an apron, and some gloves to finish off the look, and the Gibson hairstyle just seemed to flow from my pencil. It may be 10-20 years too late even for Steampunk’s broad inspiration period, but the look just fit.



Figure 14: Italian Gypsy. M. Rosetti.



Figure 15: Mrs. Lovett Acts 1 and 2. Pencil Sketches.



Figure 16: Lovett influence. Courtesy, Steampunk Fashion Livejournal.



Figure 17: Itohan Aghayere & Becky Sweren as Mrs. Lovett with Chloe Gargiula, Acts 1 & 2. Duke University.

Mrs. Lovett's Act 2 costume was more of an inspired choice. There were two costumes in this show that were directly influenced from existing research of Steampunk fashionistas. Act 1 Sweeney, as I mentioned before, was one. This was the other. A random image of a girl in a black and white striped overskirt with a black vest was my muse for taking that look and translating it into something better; something with a little more historical accuracy in its flair. I really wanted to put a slightly masculine flair to Mrs. Lovett. This is something that I tried to carry through by revisiting her act 1 costume and adding some pinstriping to the corset. For Act 2, I gave her a fitted, collared vest worn over a simple white button down shirt. I added a black and white tie to accent the matching bustle overskirt, and to complete that masculine theme.

Toby has classically been played as both a young boy and as mentally retarded depending on who was available for the role. For this production there was a sort of vagueness about this. When I approached the director with the question, he simply answered: “A little of both.” Toby needed two distinct looks for Act 1 and Act 2. When we meet him in Act 1, he is the neglected servant of Todd’s rival barber, Adolfo Pirelli. It was important to show that level of neglect, that level of poverty he is forced to live in while Pirelli makes at least a passably comfortable living for himself. This was a simple matter of dressing him in the same layers that were popular in menswear of this period, then making it almost unrecognizable through distressing. Toby’s act 1 ensemble is rather reminiscent of Oliver Twist and I referred to images of the BBC production of the story for some ideas on distress levels. All the pieces were mismatched, and often the actor would even remember to put the wrong buttons in the wrong buttonholes to complete the disheveled look. Toby also has a gimmick written into the text with a wig he wears to peddle Pirelli’s hair growth elixir. I felt it was also imperative that the wig look as awful as possible in an attempt to further demonstrate Pirelli’s neglect by showing that, even though he is a barber, he doesn’t even take the time to assist Toby in his presentation of the hairpiece.



Figure 18: Oliver Twist advert. BBC Television.

In Act 2, Toby has been taken in by Mrs. Lovett, who in all of her moral ineptitude, still takes care of and shows a fondness for Toby. Toby gets cleaned up a bit for this act because he has a newer, more caring guardian that just happens to have come into a bit of success. He begins the act as a waiter of sorts for Mrs. Lovett's now successful pie shop. I



Figure 19: Toby Acts 1 and 2. Pencil Sketches

decided to go with the traditional knickers suit idea. He now wears a nicer shirt, brown knickers with knee-high socks, suspenders, an apron, and arm garters. Later he will add a matching jacket. In the end of the play Toby goes mad after discovering Lovett's secret and disappears into the sewers. When he returns, it is in a disheveled version of his new costume.



Figure 20: Robert Krattli as Tobias Ragg Acts 1 & 2. Duke University.

Anthony Hope is the young sailor that finds and rescues Sweeney Todd and returns with him to London. Anthony is presumably in his late teens to early twenties. Originally I had developed a more western look for Anthony, something that didn't necessarily

scream “sailor,” but did give the impression of being an outsider. Mixing the idea of the frontier with the sea, I gave him high-waisted pants, a bibbed western shirt, and tall boots. However, John wanted something more stereotypically sailor, so I combined the ideas. I researched sailors from the period, most of which were sailor outfits for children as most

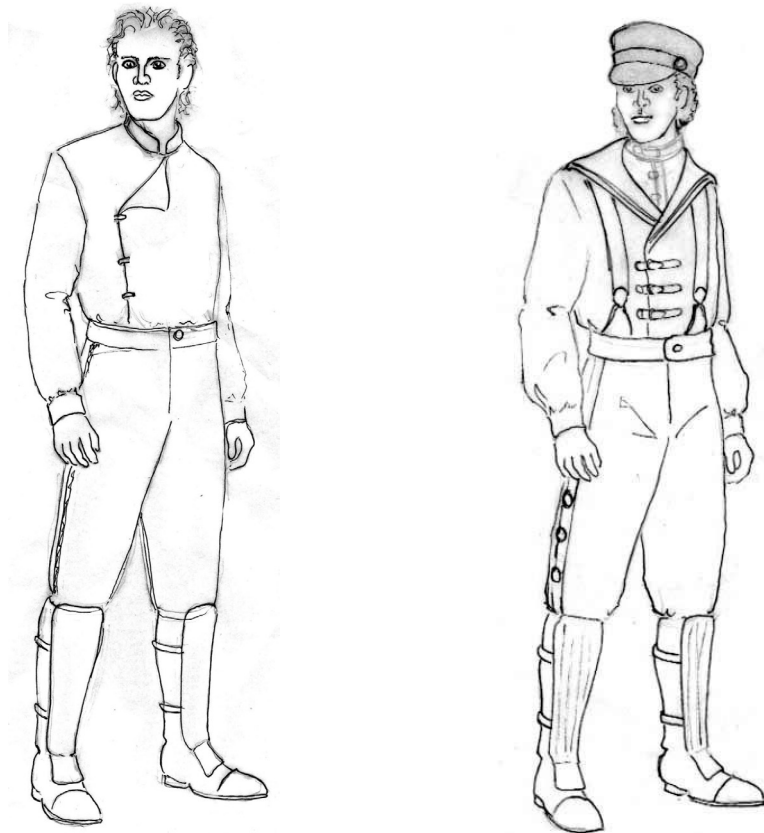


Figure 21: Evolution of Anthony Hope. Pencil Sketches.

real sailors dressed for function not form. I took that idea of the bib shirt and transposed it over a sailor shirt to try and develop my own Steampunk sailor. What I ended up with was an interesting and striking look for the young sailor. The overall look translated into reality as a little anime, but it worked for the theme.



Figure 22: Sailor reference. Unknown.



Figure 23: Matt Patrick as Anthony Hope. Duke University.

Johanna is Sweeney Todd's Daughter. She is 16 years old by the text. She is kept by Judge Turpin in her room and away from the public. It was my thought that the judge would probably lavish wealth on her, and dress her like a doll. I knew I wanted something frilly, and layered. I was particularly inspired by an Edwardian piece I found in the Kyoto book that captured the essence of what was going on in my head, but wasn't youthful enough nor Victorian enough for my tastes. This is one design where I had to completely start over to get it right. Normally when I design a character I start by sketching in the model and then I sketch in the clothing. If I don't like the design, I will often retrace the model and simply redress it when the design evolves to save myself the trouble of resketching the entire form. For Johanna I needed a complete overhaul in order to capture what was in my head even though the designs are very similar. Both involve layers of lace over taffeta in varying degrees. In the end I decided on a "layer cake" idea, taking several layers of lace ruffles and draping them over a baby blue-violet taffeta underlayer.



Figure 24: Evolution of Johanna. Pencil Sketches.



Figure 25: Johanna Dress influence. Kyoto.



Figure 26: Clare Florian as Johanna with Matt Patrick as Anthony. Duke University.

Judge Turpin is the villain of the story. He is an older man that had his eye on Todd's wife and had him banished to Botany Bay so that he would have a clearer path to her. After Todd's exile, he courted and raped Lucy, driving her insane. When she lost her mind and took to the streets, he adopted their daughter Johanna as his ward. Now that she is nearing adulthood, he has decided to take her as his wife. He is a corrupt and vile man, not above using his political power to his own ends. He is also a masochist and a pervert as demonstrated in the famous "masturbation" scene, in which, while spying on Johanna, he pleasures himself while flagellating himself with a whip. For Judge Turpin's costume I

took my inspiration from an action figure version of Darth Vader created by artist Sillof in his Steampunk reimagination of *Star Wars*. His Vader figure donned a long frock coat and thigh high boots. This idea reminded me of the masochistic and fetishistic nature of Judge Turpin while maintaining a certain vileness about the image. I started drawing ideas for the judge's frock coat to try to develop what I thought it should look like. The first attempt



Figure 27: Steampunk Darth Vader. Courtesy, Sillof.

was very simple. I then added to that idea, giving it an almost bandleader look, but was still not happy with what I had. One afternoon I received some reference images from Scenic Designer Jayme Mellama that helped me zero in on my final design for the coat. The image of an airship pirate (seen in figure 1) provided me with a cool new twist that I could use for my Judge.

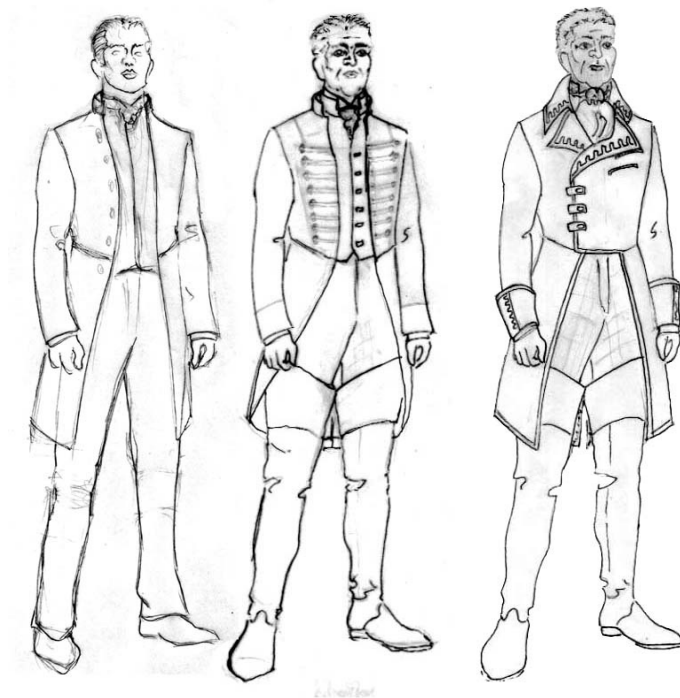


Figure 28: Evolution of Judge Turpin. Pencil Sketches.



Figure 29: Beadle Bamford. Pencil Sketch.

Beadle Bamford is the Judge's henchman. He is presumably close to Judge Turpin in age, and while not as corrupt as the judge, he still maintains his own level of dubiousness. Beadle is, without a doubt, the most straightforwardly Victorian of all my designs, and thusly was pretty much a one shot deal. I put him right down on paper, and both I and John were happy with him from the start. He is a traditional Victorian gentleman in his Burgundy frock coat, gold vest and top hat. Beadle Bamford reminded me a lot of the character of Bill The Butcher in the film *Gangs of New York*, and was not totally uninfluenced by my memory of that character. I added a couple simple pieces, such as a copper cane and a pair of pince-nez sunglasses to give him that extra little nudge into the world of the play.



Figure 30: Daniel Day-Lewis as Bill The Butcher, *Gangs of New York*. Miramax.



Figure 31: Michael Bergen as Judge Turpin With the Ted Kaywood as Beadle. Duke University.



Figure 32: Ted Kaywood as Beadle. Duke University.

I had a couple of ideas in mind for Todd's rival barber and first victim, Adolfo Pirelli. I really wanted to break away from the traditional Italian Opera look that most productions seem to lend to this character, but I had to be prepared to deal with it if it was what the director wanted. Fortunately for me, John was open to my idea of Pirelli as a man that looked as if he were wearing every piece of raiment he could muster all at once. Very similar to the character of Soaphead Church in Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye," the show I assisted Toni-Leslie James on in my last semester of grad school. I managed to dig up most of the pieces for this character in Duke's costume storage. This was only really significant because the pieces I found also helped influence the design. A navy blue tailcoat, morning pants, and a red and blue striped vest gave me the perfect start and ultimately helped to guide me back to that image of Soaphead and my homage to my Grad school teacher and mentor. I finished him off with a couple of Steampunk staples such as the goggles on his hat and the spats that add a little extra adornment to his lower leg. Though not present in the rendering, he was finished off with a large, flowing black cape with a bright red lining. Since all of his pieces were used, and most of them faded, it added to the illusion that he was trying to make himself look better off than he really was.



Figure 33: Soaphead Church in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Hartford Stage Company



Figure 34: Adolfo Pirelli. Pencil Sketch.



Figure 35: Kousha Navidar as Pirelli. Duke University.

The beggar woman that appears throughout the play was one of the most fun to design. The beggar woman is Todd's wife, Lucy. Todd does not know who she is and I felt it was important to construct some sort of physical barrier, like a hood, to help the illusion that, although he interacts with her on a couple of occasions, he never recognizes her until the end of the play. I also wanted her to reflect what she had once been, but to also look like she lived in a gutter. I took elements like her long formal gloves and her Victorian overskirt and tried to imagine them in a state so dilapidated and worn that they

were barely recognizable as anything but rags. For this character, much like Pirelli, it was all about layers. Her rough, dirtied suede corset is exposed over her ragged chemise. Her overskirt is tattered in rags, and the underskirt is made from a cheap, heavy muslin canvas that was both tattered and roughly woven.



Figure 36: Beggar Woman. Pencil Sketches.



Figure 37: Edie Wellman as The Beggar Woman. Duke University.

Part 4: Finished Renderings

The purpose of this section is to present, in its entirety, a presentation of the completed costume renderings for *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. Each rendering is presented in full color.



Figure 38: Sweeney Todd, Act 1.



Figure 39: Mrs. Lovett, Act 1.



Figure 40: Anthony Hope.



Figure 41: Johanna.



Figure 42: Beggar Woman.



Figure 43: Tobias Ragg, Act 1.



Figure 44: Judge Turpin.



Figure 45: Beadle Bamford.

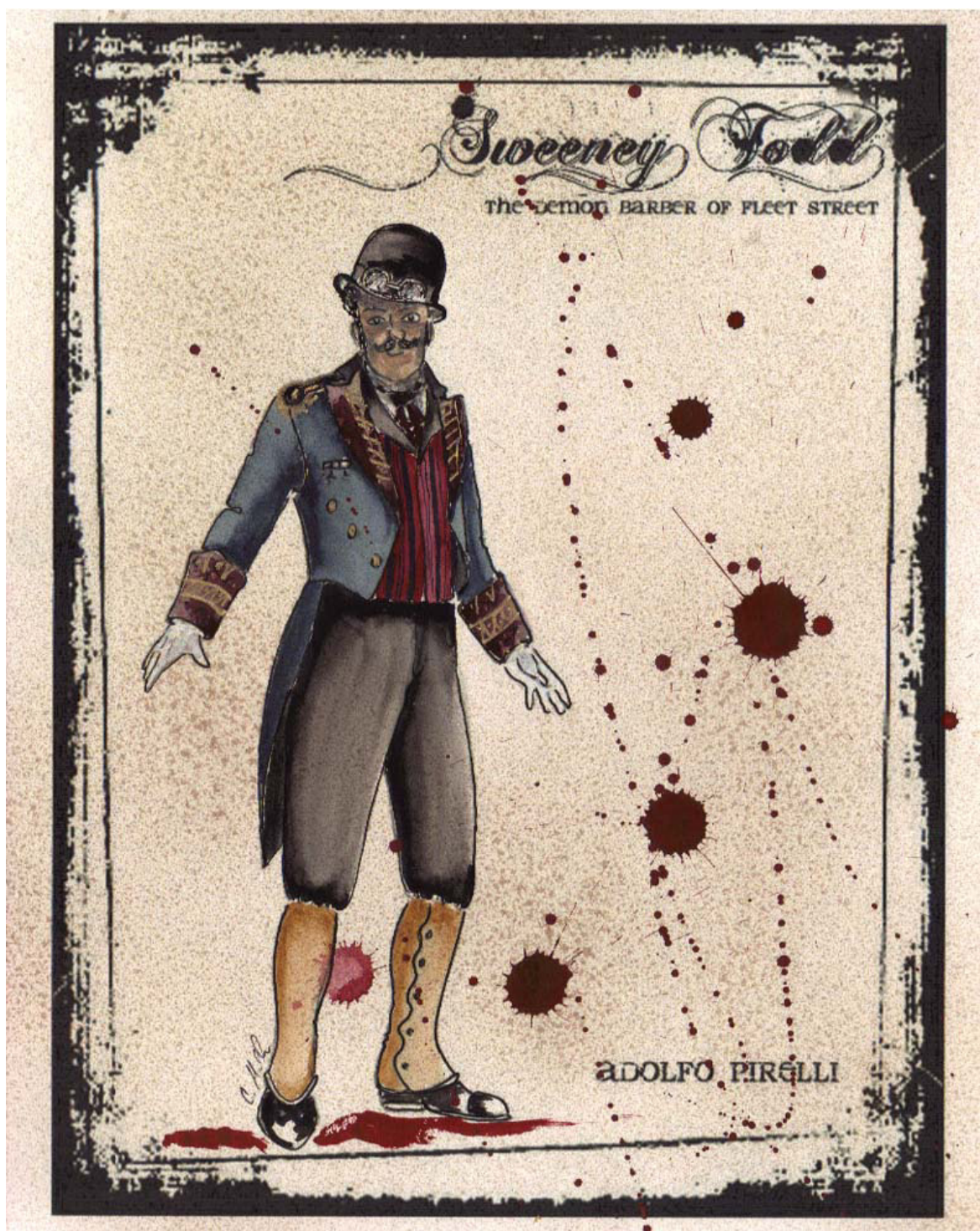


Figure 46: Señor Adolfo Pirelli.

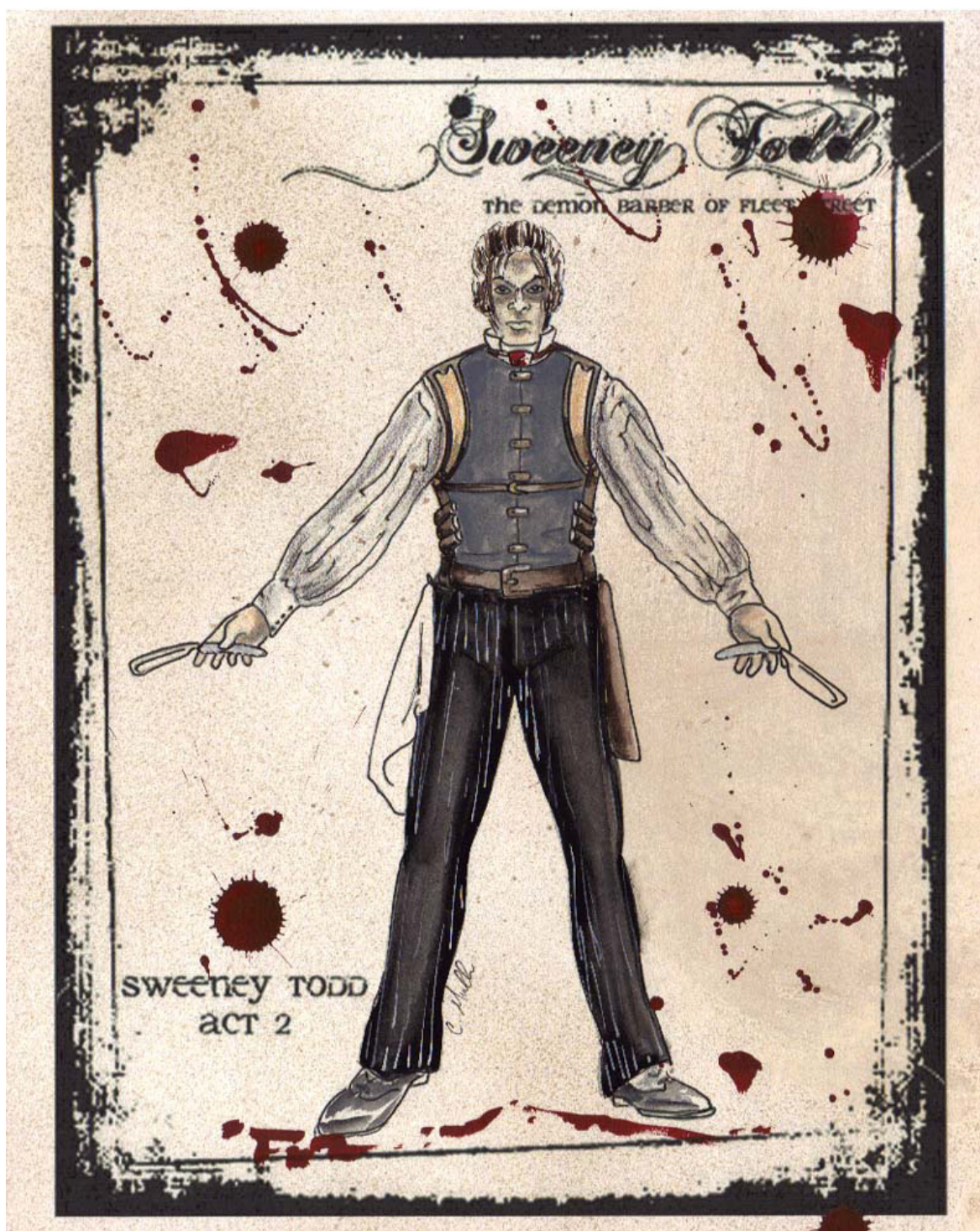


Figure 47: Sweeney Todd, Act 2.



Figure 48: Mrs. Lovett, Act 2.

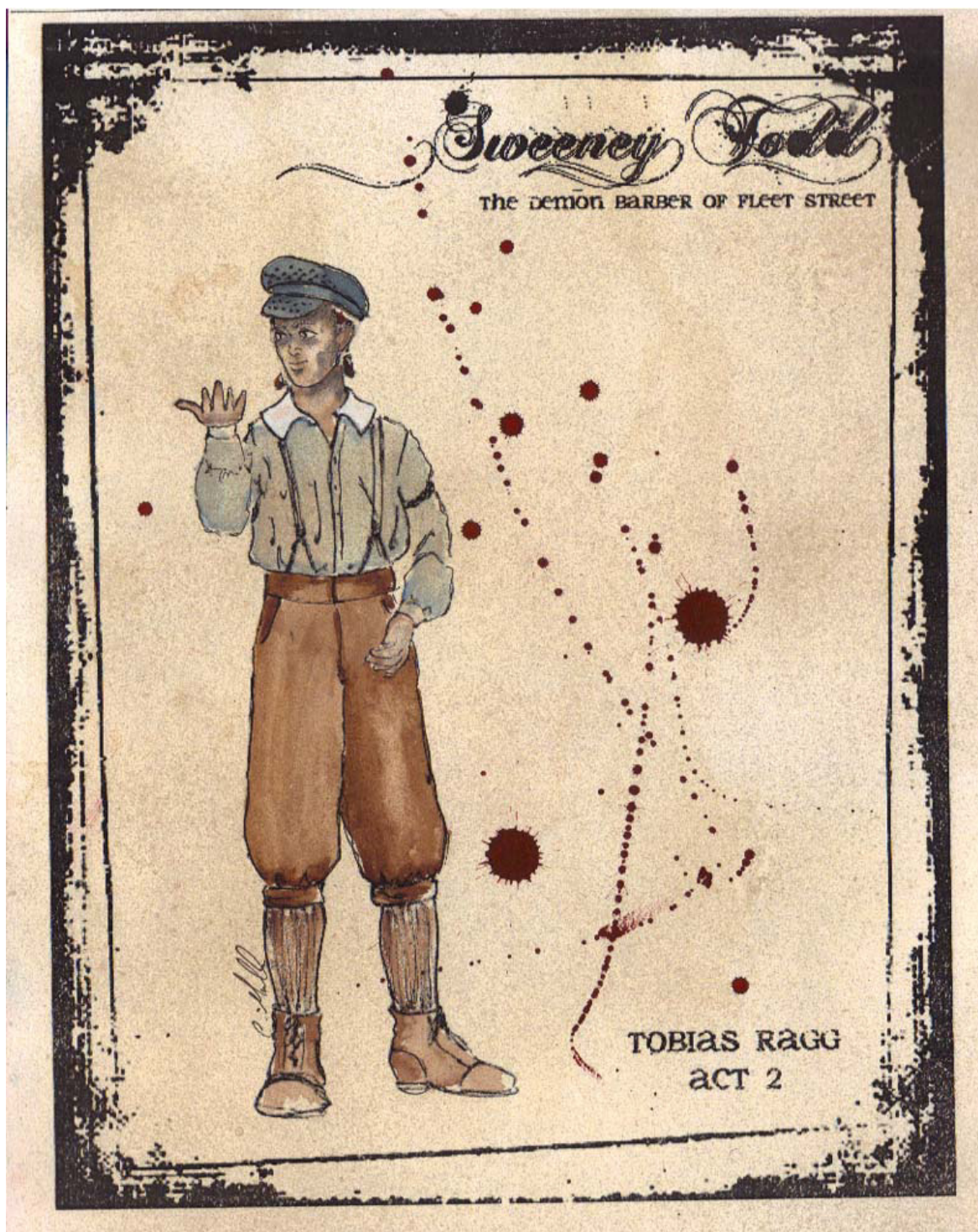


Figure 49: Tobias rag, Act 2.

Chapter 2: Execution of Design

In designing a show, the artistic part is just the icing on the cake. When you take so much time perfecting the flavor and the look of the icing, you really hope the cake doesn't taste like cardboard. And just like the icing on a cake, it's hard to tell what is going on underneath until you cut into it. Once you've developed your design, you have to make it happen; to figure out how you are going to fulfill your design. This involves working closely with the costume shop to make sure your designs are executed to your standards. It involves making decisions as to how to spend your time and money. It also involves troubleshooting those inevitable little problems and challenges that arise during the build period of production.

The shop itself was a joy to work with and Kay was very good at balancing the workload, although I do feel it may have been a little too much. This had a lot to do with the double casting. It was known from day one that the role of Sweeney Todd would be double cast, but when I arrived for initial fittings and measurements I discovered that the Judge and Mrs. Lovett were double cast as well. This, of course, poses a heavy burden, on both labor and budget, as now each of these characters requires two identical costumes for each actor performing the role. To solve this problem we simply followed through with the double costumes, though I do plan to discuss another alternative in a later section.

One very important issue had to be addressed before beginning the design process and revisited several times during the build. *Sweeney Todd* is famous for one thing above all else: the blood. Blood is always an issue for costumes. I always get the impression

that actors and directors think costumers are being lazy, whiny, or unreasonable when it comes to stage blood coming into contact with the costumes. The fact is that we like to see stage blood just as much as the next theatre patron, but sadly when you have to work on the show in question it falls to you to see that measures are taken to prolong the life of each individual costume piece. It is simply not financially viable to replace a costume piece because of an irreversible blood stain. There are five principal characters affected by blood business. These are: Sweeney Todd, Judge Turpin, the Beggar Woman, Pirelli, and to a lesser extent, Beadle. There are also two ensemble members that fall victim to Todd's razor.

The ensemble actors were among the simpler fixes in the show. Both actors are posing as customers come to get a shave from Todd. It was my suggestion that we make use of the barber smocks for this effect. Typically when one goes to get a haircut or a shave, the barber will cover you with a smock to minimize mess on your clothing. It seemed only reasonable that we run the blood effect through the barber smocks. This way the bleed effect will run down the front of the smock, never coming into contact with the costumes.

Todd was the one character I felt would be absolutely impossible to keep blood off of. Todd is the one consistent in every one of the death scenes, therefore having the highest chance of accidentally coming into contact with stage blood. It therefore became of utmost importance that everything he was wearing be washable or easily cleaned. His entire costume minus the razor harness was machine washable, and the harness itself was sealed against moisture so that it could be easily wiped down after performances.

Pirelli was another quick fix. Jeff Jones, the fight choreographer, came up with a simple solution that involved Pirelli keeping his back to the audience while squeezing a loaded rubber bulb, creating a simulated arterial spray away from the audience that would be highlighted by the lighting against the backdrop.

Judge Turpin's death scene was constructed in a similar fashion except with more blood, and this time aimed directly at Todd. As I mentioned before, Todd was prepared for this situation. I had planned on him taking blood full on himself at least during the Judge's death scene. Unfortunately, this effect was defeated not by a costume problem, but by a set problem. The barber chair was set up in such a way that when the actor slumped over to play dead, his dead weight prevented him from being wheeled into place for the trap door. This was quite disappointing for me specifically because of the planning I had put into what I felt would be a very striking scene if executed properly.

The beggar woman is one death scene that is particularly challenging from a timing standpoint. Because she is so dirty and distressed, it is highly unlikely that bleed effects would make much of a difference if they did get onto her costume. The main issue here is within the text. The beggar's death is very quick; almost as an afterthought. When Todd finds the Beggar Woman in his parlor, he is surprised by the Judge and has to dispose of her very quickly (in the time it takes the Judge to run a flight of stairs). This doesn't give much time for an effect, but it is nice to have one, so we made her bleed effect part of the costume. The actress was given a gelatin prosthetic that she could adhere to her neck prior to her death scene and cover with a piece of fabric attached to her cloak. When Todd "kills" her, he shoves her into the chair while pulling away the fabric and making a

slashing motion in a single movement. When he does so, the actress tosses her head back revealing the bright red blood prosthetic.

Most of the biggest challenges in executing this design revolved around the bleed effects. There was, however one challenging moment, in the flashback scene that had nothing to do with blood, but required a little creative thinking nonetheless. I had already solved the problem of the actor playing Lucy being able to transition from that scene to her later scenes without being recognized as Lucy Todd, but did not have the resources to provide secondary costumes to the other eight ensemble members involved in the flashback. It was important to me that there be some separation between the revelers at Turpin's masque ball of fifteen years prior and the more contemporary people of London. To solve this I simply started the eight actors out in their base costume layers (the men in their pants, vests, and shirts, and the women in their corsets, underwear and petticoats) and added hooded cloaks along with the masks required by the text. This allowed them to simply remove the cloaks and masks, and finish adding their full costume pieces. They had not needed them previously, since this was the first ensemble scene within the context of the play.



Figure 50: Ensemble Masque. Duke University

Chapter 3: Evaluation

Duke University's production of *Sweeney Todd* was my first project, outside of school, in which I had to work directly with a costume shop and crew on my own designs. Thankfully, my time with Toni at Hartford Stage and the Long Wharf Theatres somewhat prepared me for this experience. However, it was still a new experience to be in the proverbial trenches by oneself dealing with all the problems and issues that arise. Fortunately Kay Webb, Duke's costume manager, was willing to assist above and beyond her limitations and, to an extent, play the part of assistant as well as her main role of supervisor and primary draper. She was instrumental in getting me through this process alive.

The design process itself went rather smoothly for this show; almost too much so. John Clum is a director, like many, that has general idea of what he wants to see in the end product, but is not very specific in the expression of his ideas. This is typically a nightmare for most designers, but since this has been the brunt of my experience since entering this field, it is the type of director I have grown most used to working with and I feel I have developed a kind of sixth sense toward it; an ability to read between the lines, so to speak. I was able to complete most of the design work with few changes. A minor alteration to the beggar woman's neckline and a near-complete rework of Anthony were my only real changes after the initial design presentation.

Set designer Jayme Mellama and I worked very well together. His preliminary design work had already been submitted by the time of my hire and was the starting point

for much of my work. Throughout the process we assisted each other in research by sending reference back and forth and checking in on a regular basis. I also put my progress on my website so that he and the other interested production team members could view it at their leisure. This proved to be a useful tool in and of itself and it is my plan to attempt to someday expand on this idea in a forum type community.

The build, on the other hand, could have gone a little smoother. This was not due to any one party's error. All groups involved played a part in all of our snags that slowed us down and put us slightly over budget. The budget for this production was, as mentioned earlier, \$5,500.00 for materials and \$8,000.00 for labor. The material budget was exceeded by just under \$1,000.00. This was mostly due to issues with the over abundance in double cast characters. Because of the size and scale of a production like *Sweeney Todd*, \$5,500.00 is a fairly meager budget, but not undoable. It does not, however, provide well for duplication of costumes on 3 different characters, two of which have costume changes.

This is the one major detail that would return to haunt us on several occasions. We simply did not have the money or skilled labor to execute this build in timely manner. The combination of state budget cuts and an uninvolved student work study force left us with only 3-4 students that regularly came in to work their weekly hours, of which were only about 12 hours per week. To help remedy this, Kay hired local freelance Costume Designer and Technician, Denise Schumaker to assist with the build. Denise would come in for nearly a full 40 hour week, bringing our full time shop staff up to two, not nearly a large enough crew for a 27 member cast.

The build time this production was just under six weeks. This is more than ample time to execute such a build under nominal operating conditions. However, we pushed build right up to opening night. That is to say that the first night all costume pieces were finished and onstage was on opening. There were many factors that contributed to this. There was, of course, our understaffed costume shop, but also a skill level that was much lower than that which was described in early meetings. The main drag toward the end of our build was one piece in particular. Judge Turpin's frock coat was the one complex piece of menswear that I had earmarked for build rather than purchase. Unfortunately, this was one of those pieces that was duplicated for a double cast role. It is also important here that Kay had very little training or experience in men's tailoring. It was my intention to provide as much advice and help as possible with these pieces, but my attentions were often needed elsewhere. This one piece ended up taking the main technician's focus for far too long, distracting her from other things and chaining into and adversely affecting the largest and most complex build item in the show: Johanna's dress. This was the most disappointing part of this process for me, because Johanna's dress was, quite possibly, the crown jewel of this collection. Corners were cut, many things were rushed, and the end result was something a little more slap-dash than I would have liked and there was no time or material to redo it. In retrospect, this is something I should have remedied by finding a suitable off-the-rack substitute for the Judge's coats. This small sacrifice could have saved both myself and the shop countless hours of worry, and would have provided ample time to properly execute Johanna's dress.

Johanna's wig was also a minor problem. The wig that I purchased was in an antebellum style with the top and sides drawn back and framed with ringlet curls. The sides proved to be far too full on the slight frame of the actress wearing it and its volume threatened to overwhelm her. I came up with two plans to alleviate this problem. The first was to simply restyle the wig. The second was to cut it completely and replace it with a simpler hairpiece that could be attached to the back of the actress' own hair. I was persuaded to avoid changing anything that may require a new build or shopping for more materials and the original wig was restyled to lessen its volume. Unfortunately, as it would turn out, stage action throughout the course of the play would often undo the styling and cause the wig's volume to slowly expand. This, in turn, called for routine daily maintenance of the wig. This was problematic with an understaffed, underskilled wardrobe crew. The end result did not look completely horrible, but should have been cut and replaced with my backup plan nonetheless.

The shop had no craftsperson, and Kay, who is chiefly trained as a painter/dyer, was occupied with getting the costumes built. In order to get my leatherwork and distressing done for the show, I had to do it myself. In the end there was much more distressing I would have liked to see in this production. I had a far more dilapidated vision for this show that I was not able to achieve because I simply didn't have the extra time or labor to spare in order to complete it. I had already spread myself fairly thin with the leatherwork and my already existing duties as the designer and really only had one full day to dedicate to distressing the costumes. This was only a minor issue however. There was a great deal of distressing done, and much of it actually shows up in the production photos.

The distressing simply needed to be more extreme to be seen by the naked eye from the audience.

Many of the problems that arose for me during this build are things that I hope will be avoided on the next production. Theory is no substitute for experience. All the theoretical class projects in the world don't prepare you for the part of interacting with a full production and design team and your own build team. You can learn about it all you want, but you can't really grasp the entire gravity of it until you actually get out and get into a real world situation on a real production. Sadly my biggest problem on this production, and on several other productions I have designed in the past, comes down to a bad habit I have of second guessing myself. The majority of the problems that arose were met with an initial gut reaction that I need to learn to listen to instead of trying to make the existing problem situation work. The wig debacle is a great example of this. If I had simply gone with the urge to replace the wig, I would feel better now about the end result.

One important lesson I learned from this experience that isn't ever really discussed in the classroom is that of contract negotiation. There were several oversights, such as travel reimbursement, that I had never thought of being part of one's design contract. Fortunately, the people at Duke were kind enough to amend my contract to include my travel. This was, however, mainly because of a verbal agreement between myself and the faculty member responsible for my hire. While my original contract was void of any mention of travel reimbursement, the director had given me verbal confirmation of said reimbursement, and I did not think of looking for it in my contract. This taught me to be wary of what may seem like common sense when reviewing an employment agreement,

but is, in reality, a detail that may easily be overlooked by an inexperienced young designer. This among other things has made me realize an importance in educating students on the business side of theatre. An aspect often overlooked in our attempt to educate them on as many aspects as possible of theatre itself.

Problems aside, the show was an overall success both personally and performance-wise. I learned a lot from this experience and the show itself played to sold out houses almost every night. The people at Duke were a pleasure to work with, and for the size of their program, they put on a quality of performance far beyond what they should be able to. The facilities are adequate, and the professional staff that runs theatre operations are excellent at their jobs. I've already been unofficially invited back to work with them again, and would be more than happy to do so. Ultimately, I feel I have grown with this experience, and it will make me even better prepared for my next production.

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